

Message Text

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SUBJECT: MAY 16 NEW YORK TIMES STORY

FOLLOWING STORY BY JOHN DARNTON ENTITLED "CONFLICT COMES
AS SURPRISE" CARRIED NEW YORK TIMES (ACCOMPANYING REUTERS
STORY NOTED THE STATUS OF KOLWEZI AND MUTSHATSHA WAS
DISPUTED):

QUOTE. NAIROBI, KENYA, MAY 15 - SHABA PROVINCE HAS NOT
BEEN QUIET SINCE AN INSURRECTION THERE WAS QUELLED A
YEAR AGO, BUT THE LATEST OUTBREAK OF FIGHTING HAS
APPARENTLY CAUGHT THE GOVERNMENT AND WESTERN OBSERVERS
BY SURPRISE.

ONLY LAST MONTH, GOVERNMENT OFFICIALS AND EUROPEAN AND
AMERICAN DIPLOMATS IN KINSHASA, THE CAPITAL, DESCRIBED
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THE SITUATION IN SHABA AS UNDER CONTROL EVEN THOUGH BANDS
OF REBELS WERE PERIODICALLY SLIPPING ACROSS THE BORDER
FROM ANGOLA TO PLANT MINES AND AMBUSH ZAIRIAN TROOPS.

SKETCHY REPORTS FROM KINSHASA NOW SUGGEST THAT THE REBELS,
INCLUDING INSURGENTS WHO FLED WHEN THE PROVINCE TRIED TO
SECEDE IN THE 1960'S, HOLD PART OF THE CITY OF KOLWEZI, AN

IMPORTANT COPPER MINING TOWN.

IF THE REPORTS PROVE ACCURATE, THEN THE REBELS HAVE ALREADY ACHIEVED MORE IN A FOUR-DAY SURPRISE ATTACK THAN THEY DID DURING LAST YEAR'S 80-DAY WAR, WHEN THEY HELD SUBSTANTIAL AREAS BUT NEVER SUCCEEDED IN PENETRATING THE PROVINCE'S KEY TOWN.

AS IF TO EXPLAIN SUCH A RAPID ADVANCE, THE OFFICIAL ZAIRIAN PRESS AGENCY, AZAP, SAID THAT THE REBELS SLIPPED INTO THE TO UNDER THE COVER OF DARKNESS THURSDAY NIGHT IN CIVILIAN CLOTHES. THE AGENCY SAID THAT THE REBELS, THOUGH BASED IN ANGOLA, CAME THROUGH NORTHERN ZAMBIA, AND NUMBERED 4,000--A FIGURE THAT SOME DIPLOMATIC SOURCES BELIEVE MAY BE SLIGHTLY EXAGGERATED.

THE SOURCES POINTED OUT THAT PRESIDENT MOBUTU SESE SEKO, WHO RELIED ON 1,500 MOROCCAN TROOPS TRANSPORTED IN FRENCH PLANES TO PUT DOWN THE INSURRECTION LAST YEAR, IS EQUALLY IN NEED OF OUTSIDE ASSISTANCE THIS TIME AND SO IS LIKELY TO HAVE NO COMPUNCTIONS ABOUT FORCEFULLY STATING THE DRAMA OF ZAIRE'S PREDICAMENT.

NONETHELESS, THE PREDICAMENT IS REAL. ZAIRIAN TROOPS STATIONED IN SHABA ARE POORLY PAID AND EVEN POORLY FED, SINCE ONLY ABOUT 50 PERCENT OF THE AREA'S POPULATION HAS RETURNED
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SINCE LAST YEAR'S CONFLICT AND AGRICULTURAL PRODUCTION HAS NOT RECOVERED. THE LOCAL PEOPLE CANNOT BE SAID TO FEEL DEEP LOYALTY TO THE GOVERNMENT AND WITH THE COUNTRY'S ECONOMY STAGNANT AND INFLATION RUNNING AT THE RATE OF 75 PERCENT DISCONTENT IS SO WIDESPREAD THAT THE CONFLICT COULD IGNITE CONFLAGRATIONS ELSEWHERE.

IN JANUARY, THE GOVERNMENT SAID IT HAD SQUASHED A NASCEN REBELLION IN BANDUNDU PROVINCE, 300 MILES EAST OF THE CAPITAL. IT SAID THE REBELS WERE KATANGAN INSURGENTS WHO HAD MADE THEIR WAY NORTH AFTER LAST YEAR'S WAR, BUT OTHER, RELIABLE, SOURCES SAID ,HEY WERE DISGRUNTLED LOCAL INHABITANTS.

SINCE THE END OF THE FIGHTING LAST MAY, THERE HAVE BEEN NUMEROUS INCIDENTS ALONG THE BORDER WITH ANGOLA, WHERE SOME 7U,000 SHABA REFUGEES HAVE FLED. THE KATANGAN REBELS, IT WAS SAID, WERE NEVER SOUNDLY DEFEATED BUT SIMPLY DRIVEN ACROSS THE BORDER.

IN FEBRUARY THERE WERE REPORTS OF THOUSANDS OF KATANGESE SOLDIERS MASSING AT LUASH, JUST INSIDE ANGOLA ABOUT 70

MILES SOUTHWEST OF MUSHATSHA, A STRATEGIC TOWN ON THE ROAD TO KOLWEZI. NO MAJOR SKIRMISHES TOOK PLACE, HOWEVER, AND THE THREAT HAD SEEMED TO SUBSIDE.

DIPLOMATIC OBSERVERS WHO SAID THE SITUATION APPEARED UNDER CONTROL A MONTH AGO POINTED OUT THAT UNLIKE LAST YEAR, WHEN BORDER TOWNS WERE DEFENDED BY ONLY A SMATTERING OF TROOPS, THE GOVERNMENT HAD NOW STATIONED ABOUT 10,000 TROOPS AND POLICEMEN OUT OF ITS TOTAL COMBINED FORCE OF 70,000 IN THE AREA. MOST OF THEM ARE MEMBERS OF THE KAMANYOLA BRIGADE, A SPECIAL UNIT THAT WAS ORIGINALLY TRAINED BY NORTH KOREANS ADVISERS. THESE HAVE SINCE WITHDRAWN AND HAVE BEEN REPLACED BY FRENCH AND BELGIUM ADVISERS. END QUOTE.
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